Radio in the Service of the Second Resistance

(English translation, 1947) – Milan Janota

English translation of the original 1947 Czech-language article by Prof. Milan Janota. Translation provided for reference and accessibility. [Google Translate]

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Prof. Milan Janota.
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"Foreign radio was our daily bread during the occupation" — everyone who was here during the German rule states. We are sure that it really was. On the other hand, radio became the most feared weapon against Nazism and fascism for the united nations.

We could say that the radio propaganda of the states and nations fighting for democracy was really, next to material war resources, artillery, aircraft of all kinds, machine guns, etc. - the most powerful weapon.

The Czechoslovak second resistance, of course, seized this weapon immediately after the violent occupation by the Nazi invaders. There was not even the Second World War when various Beneš speeches delivered after March 15, 1939 in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago were broadcast on the radio. We point out here in particular the celebration of the association of Czechoslovak legionnaires in America, held on May 27, 1939 in Chicago, at which President Beneš unfurled the banner of the second Czechoslovak resistance and which received a great response on American radio broadcasts.

Regular radio broadcasts, serving the second foreign resistance, began to be organized the day after the outbreak of the World War, on Monday, September 4, 1939, both in France and in England. In France, the first Ministry of Information was established, to which all news programs were assigned in the beautiful palace of the Ministry of PTT (Postes, Telégraphes, Tele-phones). At the same time, a propaganda broadcasting station was established in the small Norman fishing port town of Fécamp (Seine Inferieure) on the English Channel. This radio station was called "La Libre Tehécoslovaquie".

While the Czechoslovak programs broadcast from the PTT Palace in Paris were directly controlled by the French government, the radio station La Libre Tchecoslovaquie was managed by the Czechoslovak embassy in Paris and was only indirectly subject to censorship by the French Ministry of Information. That is why we call it censorship, because these were sometimes too harsh on the part of the then Daladier government, undermining any propaganda activity.

Although the Daladier government declared war on Germany, the Munich spirit did not disappear from it. I will never forget when Jean Mistler, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the French Chamber of Deputies, called me on the telephone one evening and emphatically reminded me that I was not allowed to speak of Nové Zámce, Levice, Lučenec and Košice as Slovak cities in my radio broadcasts, because they belonged to Hungary and, supposedly, the Daladier government, which was waging the war, also recognized the Vienna Arbitration. However, it was an even greater

surprise for me when the same high-ranking French politician and statesman, at a meeting at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, energetically forbade me from attacking Mussolini, or fascist Italy. He justified his order simply by saying that Mussolini's Italy was a neutral state and that the Daladier government was currently negotiating to guarantee the neutrality of fascist Italy until the end of the war. These are just two examples, along with a long list of others, that prove how hard the Czechoslovak foreign radio worked in a state that was at war with Hitler's Germany. However, we believe that in its early days this radio also fulfilled its mission. It was from French radio stations that the first energetic Czechoslovak attacks against various Hâch and Tiso speeches delivered on the days of the student executions came out; these stations broadcast serious speeches by the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris, the first organization that, headed by Dr. Jan Šrámek, continued the continuity of the Czechoslovak state. Czechoslovak resistance radio stations in France broadcast regularly until June 15, 1940. Two days later, the French government in Bordeaux, headed by Marshal Petain, accepted the surrender agreement. Parallel to Czechoslovak radio broadcasts in France, with England entering the war against Hitler's Germany, regular broadcasts for Czechoslovakia gradually began. But here too, at the beginning of the war, great difficulties were encountered. The first was political and the second organizational. The French Munich government, which declared war on Nazism, had its counterpart in the English Chamberlain government, which, as far as its approach to the Czechoslovak question was concerned, was no less Munich than Daladier in France. From an organizational point of view, it must be noted that at that time the English radio company, the British Broadcasting Corporation, was already one of the most respected and influential in terms of its political influence and power. Czechoslovak radio in England was therefore organized within the framework of the BBC's foreign-language broadcasts and as such was organizationally subordinate to the British Broadcasting Corporation and, through it, politically to the English government.

However, from the very beginning, Czechoslovak radio in England developed more purposefully and politically than it did in France. Let us recall the historic speech of President Beneš, who was the first statesman ever to say in his radio address to the nation at home, on September 18, 1939, he spoke about organizing resistance, about organizing systematic sabotage of the German war machine. Similarly as in France and England at the time when Chamberlain's government was waging the so-called "drôle de guerre" against Hitler, the Czechoslovak radio and its aggressiveness suffered a lot. Only after the fall of France and after the recognition of the Czechoslovak provisional government in London (July 1940) did the proper organization of a permanent Czechoslovak broadcast from England occur. The current director general of the Czechoslovak Radio, B. Laštovička, stood at the cradle of this developing radio. The extent to which the Czechoslovak Radio in London was home to the nation would be best appreciated by those who were in the republic during the war. But the Czechoslovak broadcast from London will remain a significant factor in the history of the second Czechoslovak resistance, both at home and abroad. Jan Masaryk, who spoke to the nation every Wednesday and whose lectures were published in a book in various world languages, entitled "Speaking to my Country" (the foreword to the book was written by the then Foreign Minister Antonín Eden), informed our people at home about what was happening in the world. His task until the landing of the Allied armies in North Africa (November 8, 1942) was very difficult. He had nothing positive, nothing promising, nothing full of hope that he could have said to the nation. He and the other Czechoslovak radio workers in England undertook this difficult task honorably. When fortune turned, the war in favor of the United Nations, their task was much easier.

This framework also includes the radio connections that the Czechoslovak government maintained with the homeland. It is no military secret that every Czechoslovak paratrooper was trained in advance in England on how to operate a shortwave radio. When he was then sent to the rear of the German army on the territory of the republic, every Czechoslovak paratrooper had one shortwave radio with him. Only our most qualified politicians and military officials can comment extensively on this aspect of the importance of radio for the second Czechoslovak resistance.

Soon after the outbreak of World War II, Czechoslovak emigrants, having taken refuge in Soviet Russia, formed the "Czechoslovak National Committee" with its headquarters in Moscow under the leadership of Klement Gottwald. Within this supreme organization, subcommittees were created, such as political, social, cultural, publishing and then propaganda.

The latter also included Czechoslovak radio propaganda from the USSR. Two broadcasts were established. Czech radio from the Soviet Union broadcast as the station "Za Národní Osvobození", and Slovak radio from the USSR broadcast as the "station "Za slovenskú Sloboda". It is more than natural that until June 22, 1941, when Soviet Russia was a neutral state in the European conflict, preparing for a decisive struggle with fascism and Nazism, it followed the political line of the Soviet government. After that day, both Czech and Slovak broadcasts from Moscow placed themselves fully at the service of the second Czechoslovak resistance. In December 1941, when Moscow was threatened by the Nazi army, the Czechoslovak radio in Soviet Russia moved to the city of Ufa, the main seat of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Republic, from where daily radio broadcasts of Czech and Slovak news and appeals urging the people at home to resist the occupiers were broadcast via Kuibyshev. It was mainly the current Minister of Information, Kopecký, who was entrusted with this task. We believe that the systematic organization of resistance units in the rear of the German army, as well as the systematic organization of the partisan movement in our country, is the work of the Czechoslovak radio abroad, standing in the service of our second resistance. In this respect, radio propaganda for the liberation of the nations enslaved by the Nazis in the midst of "Festung Europa" did a historic job. It is beyond our competence to mathematically determine which radio, the BBC in London or the radio in Moscow, had a greater share in the uprising of the European nations against Nazi-fascism. The writer of these lines was abroad throughout the Second World War and therefore cannot estimate with reliable accuracy which of the two radios had a decisive influence on the Czechoslovak resistance movement at home. Whether London or Moscow, or whether both Czechoslovak radios together.

As for the Czechoslovak radio in America, we will mention it in particular in the article "Radio in America".

Be that as it may, it was the radio that in the years 1939—1945 kept the nation's faith and determination in final victory.